



What is a Riparian Area and How Does it Work?

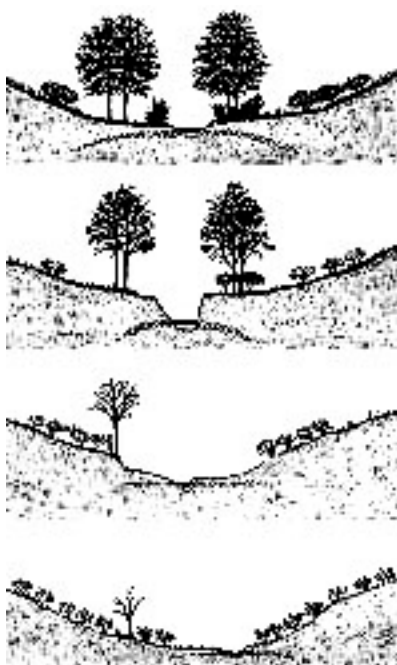
Riparian areas are the green zones along streams and rivers and around lakes, springs and bogs. When they stay wet through most of the year, like marshes or swamps, we also call them "Wetlands."

Riparian areas are important because they:

- Improve water quality by filtering out sediment
- Act as sponges to reduce flooding and increase water available for drinking and irrigating
- Provide habitat for fish, wildlife, and livestock
- Are special recreation areas for people.



Riparian Area Mechanics



The most severe damage to western riparian areas began in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Settlers were unfamiliar with their new environment. They did not realize their actions could have long term consequences. Logging, mining, grazing and even recreational uses have contributed to changes to our riparian areas.

The primary problem is a loss of stream-side plant life.

Without plants to hold soil in place:

- stream banks erode,
- water is filled with sediment, and
- channel locations and sizes change.

When a riparian area erodes away, the water table lowers. Aspen, willows, forbs and grasses die from lack of water and are replaced by plants less suitable for wildlife and livestock.